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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GERMANY: NOT PUSHING FOR LUKASHENKA INVITE TO EU
SUMMIT IN MAY

REF: 3/6 GIAUQUE E-MAIL

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Jeffrey Rathke for reasons:
1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. German Chancellery and MFA contacts agree that inviting Belarusian President Lukashenka to the May 7 EU Summit launching the Eastern Partnership (EaP) would be a mistake, although they support continuing the suspension of EU sanctions for another six months and allowing Belarus to participate at a lower level during the Summit. Germany supports the Czech position that Belarusian recognition of the two break-away provinces in Georgia would cross a "red line," foreclosing the potential for Belarus to participate fully in the EaP. The MFA is concerned that the Belarusian decisions to cancel high-level meetings with the EU and the U.S. are "in no way a good sign" for what Belarus plans in the near term. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Post delivered reftel points on the March 16-17 EU General Affairs and External Affairs (GAERC) meeting to contacts at both the MFA and the Chancellery, emphasizing our concern about recent negative actions by Belarus and our belief that inviting President Lukashenka to the May 7 EU summit launching the East Partnership (EaP) could undermine his incentive for further reform. MFA Deputy European Correspondent Thomas Schieb told us on March 13 that while Germany strongly supports the extension of the suspension of EU sanctions against Belarus for a further six months -- which Germany hoped would be agreed at the March 16-17 GAERC -- it was against inviting Lukashenka to the May 7 Summit. He said, however, that Germany was open to inviting Belarus to participate at a lower level (perhaps FM Martynov).

THE EU SANCTIONS SAGA

13. (C) Schieb noted that the EU was divided over the question whether the sanction regime itself, which is due to expire in October, should be extended at the March 16-17 GAERC. Schieb said Germany was against this idea (promoted, he said, by the UK and others), believing it would send a "contradictory message" to extend the sanctions regime at the same time the sanctions themselves continued to be suspended. Germany thought it would be better to postpone consideration of the fate of the sanctions regime until closer to its expiration date. Schieb noted that the COREPER was meeting today (March 13) to try to reach a compromise on this issue so that it would not have to be resolved by ministers themselves at the GAERC.

14. (C) Putting the sanctions decision into the broader context, MFA Deputy Division Head for Russia, Ukraine and Belarus Simon argued that a return to a full sanctions regime would "send the wrong signal," given recent improvements in Belarus (e.g., registering the "For Freedom" organization, allowing two independent newspapers to circulate, etc.). Chancellery Head of EU Foreign Relations Division Sigmund

emphasized that such improvements needed to be rewarded and enticed to continue. According to the Chancellery, if the sanctions did not remain suspended, it would foreclose the option of inviting Belarus to discuss fully their EaP participation.

WAITING ON HOW TO INCLUDE BELARUS IN THE EU'S EASTERN PARTNERSHIP

15. (C) Chancellery contacts agreed that an invitation to the May 7 EU Summit would send too positive a signal and could bolster Lukashenka's popularity too much, and viewed his participation as "totally unacceptable." Such an invite would help neither Chancellor Merkel nor FM Steinmeier in a year with multiple European, national and regional elections. Simon expected the EU to decide in April who should represent Belarus as the Summit. He suggested Belarusian FM Martynov or Head of the Presidential Administration Makey, and hoped Belarus would participate at a high level, but not at the highest level. According to the Chancellery, Sweden and Poland earlier supported inviting Lukashenka, but have reversed their position.

16. (C) However, the decision to invite Belarus to the Summit largely hinges on whether Belarus recognizes South Ossetia and Abkhazia, according to Chancellery and MFA contacts. The EU Summit in March should address the "Summit Declaration" for the May launching of the EaP, in which Germany wants to include a section on territorial integrity. Germany hopes to preclude the possibility that Belarus will take part in the EaP and then recognize the two breakaway provinces, according to Sigmund. It would be "a problem for the EU if Belarus

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recognized two weeks after the Summit."

17. (C) Contacts expected that Belarus will take part in the multilateral part of the EaP, but not the bilateral efforts. The MFA and Chancellery said that the EaP will be launched with only five countries participating in the bilateral programs between the EU and an eastern partner, but stressed that the regional efforts are significant and need Belarusian participation to work on issues such as border crossings and international crime.

18. (C) Contacts hoped that Belarus would be interested in this more limited participation, but vaguely expressed their concern that Belarus might want more from the EU. FM Martynov last month during his visit to Berlin stressed that Belarus only is interested in being an "equal partner" in the EaP, and remains under significant pressure from Russia concerning recognition of the two provinces. MFA and Chancellery contacts elaborated that Martynov conveyed his concern regarding "credit problems" and the need to secure more loans. However, they stopped short of reporting that Martynov directly linked full EaP participation with a threat to recognize the provinces.

TACKLING BELARUS

19. (C) Although Germany is eager to include Belarus in the EaP as an effort to "bind them to our model" of democracy and weaken Russia's influence, Sigmund emphasized that Germany is not blind to the domestic democratic failings nor Lukashenka's history. During a visit to Minsk in late February, German Human Rights Commissioner Nooke criticized the current domestic situation during meetings with First Deputy Interior Minister Kuleshov and Deputy Minister of Justice Bodak. Overall, Germany sees a step-by-step approach to Belarus as most promising given that "Lukashenka will not allow" democracy to emerge in the near term. According to Simon, the EU is seeking benchmarks for democratic progress, especially in the areas of media and freedom of assembly. (COMMENT: The MFA appeared highly interested in continuing to cooperate with the U.S. on Belarus, especially in seeking common benchmarks as our reftel talking points on media and

assembly lined up with their preferences. END COMMENT.)
Simon openly wondered if the recent Belarusian decisions to
cancel a high-level visit to DC and the visit of an EU
official to Minsk were a foreshadowing that Minsk is less
interested in improving relations with the West. However, EU
External Relations Commission Ferrero-Waldner hopefully will
visit Minsk in mid-April, according to Simon.
Koenig